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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000614

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA; TREASURY FOR AHERN/MOGER; NSC
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TAGS: [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [ETRD](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [PINR](#)

SUBJECT: MOVEMENT AND ACCESS EASIER IN WESTERN NABLUS,
STILL TROUBLESOME EAST AND SOUTH

REF: JERUSALEM 479

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (SBU) Summary: During a visit to Nablus on April 1, ConGenOffs observed an improvement in movement and access on the west side of Nablus. The former checkpoint at Beit Iba has been completely dismantled, and permits still are not required at its replacement checkpoint two kilometers to the west. The IDF also removed a roadgate and a dirt mound west of downtown Nablus, reconnecting western villages to the city center. The head of PA Civil Affairs in Nablus acknowledged this improvement, but noted that checkpoints to the south and east of the city remain onerous, especially the one at Huwarra. End Summary.

Nablus Reconnected With Western Villages

12. (U) ConGen EconOffs and USCS officers visited Nablus on April 1 to review movement and access around the city. Site visits confirm that the former Beit Iba checkpoint has been completely dismantled and that permits still are not required at its replacement checkpoint two kilometers to the west (reftel).

13. (SBU) Site visits also confirmed that the IDF removed a dirt mound that previously blocked traffic in and out of Sarra village (southwest of Nablus), as well as a roadgate near Al Juneid village along the Old Qalqilya road. The two openings allow the surrounding villages of Qusin, Sarra, Al Juneid, and Bet Wazan access to An Najah University and downtown Nablus. The openings also allow the free flow of traffic along one of the main east-west routes inside Nablus. However, the IDF also installed a new road barrier between Sarra village and nearby Jit junction, preventing access onto Route 60. (Photos and descriptions of these changes are available on ConGen Jerusalem's unclassified intelink site - http://www.intelink.gov/communities/state/pal_econ)

Recent GOI Decisions Reflect Shifting Policy
Toward Restrictions Around Nablus

14. (C) Luay al-Assadi, head of PA Civil Affairs in Nablus, said that there has been a palpable shift in Israeli policy toward movement and access around Nablus and that he expects more (unspecified) changes in the future. This relaxation goes beyond checkpoints, he said. For example, he noted that the GOI allowed more than 6,000 farmers in the Nablus governorate to harvest their olives in 2008 for the first time in several years, and that several Nablus farmers were permitted to plow land that had been previously off limits to them. Al-Assadi said his Israeli counterparts attribute the

policy change to security cooperation, intelligence exchanges, and the PA's ability to implement rule of law.

Huwarra, Sarra, and Hamra: Priority Removals

¶15. (C) Al-Assadi said further steps are needed to improve movement and access around nablus. He ranked Huwarra (the main checkpoint south of Nablus, which still requires permits) at the top of the PA's list of checkpoints around Nablus to be removed, followed by the newly closed gate near Sarra village, and the Hamra checkpoint connecting Nablus with the Jordan Valley. According to al-Assadi, Israeli authorities recently offered to expand Huwarra checkpoint from one to five lanes, but the Nablus Governor rejected the offer. Al-Assadi said there is an ongoing debate among Palestinians about whether to expand Huwarra.

¶16. (C) According to Palestinian business contacts, conditions at Hamra checkpoint have become particularly troublesome for Palestinians. They claim the IDF soldiers manning Hamra are especially difficult and the closure of the checkpoint at night - when fresh produce can be transported without diminishing its quality - severely harms Palestinian farmers. Members of the Nablus Chamber of Commerce reported that more than 70 traders and 3000 laborers connected with the fruit and vegetable sector in Nablus have become unemployed since ¶2000.

¶17. (C) Comment: During a meeting with Nablus businessmen on April 1, EconOffs noticed a perceptible decrease in anger on the checkpoints issues. Discussion of checkpoints was not as

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extensive as in the recent past.

¶18. (C) Bio Note: Luay al-Assadi, probably in his early 40s, has been in his position for a year. He appears focused on his job and has an inviting, easy-going personality. Al-Assadi says he has built strong relations of trust with his Israeli counterparts. Al-Assadi has applied unusual techniques to build that trust. For example, Al-Assadi says he persuades his GOI counterparts to drive with him around Nablus to view checkpoints and discuss various issues; often the next day, he says he sees IDF units taking the same tour. WALLS